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THE AMERICAN THESIS

By now you have been introduced in very basic terms to a number of significant units of information. We have attempted to show you what intelligence is, what its objectives are, and some of the basic techniques of procuring and handling information of intelligence value. During this last week we have tried to make clear the basic theories and tactics, and the organizations through which the theories are implemented, of our primary opposition at the present time - the Soviet Union and world communism.

A number of things are, of course, still lacking. The implementation of clandestine operations will be the subject matter of the course of study most of you will take next. And in other courses you will be introduced to the functional organization of CIA which was presented here only in general terms. But at this particular time, among the other things which seem to be needed, we feel, is a reintroduction or reorientation to some of our own basic premises - which, for want of a better term, we have called The American Thesis. There are two important reasons why we consider this to be advisable. First, our thesis, our way of living, is under constant attack by our opponents (and sometimes by our friends and potential friends). Some of the criticisms are justified; most of them are completely unfounded. Since we have devoted some attention to the theories of these opponents, a statement of our thesis is in order, particularly since we believe that it is incomparably better than that of the Communists. In addition to clarifying

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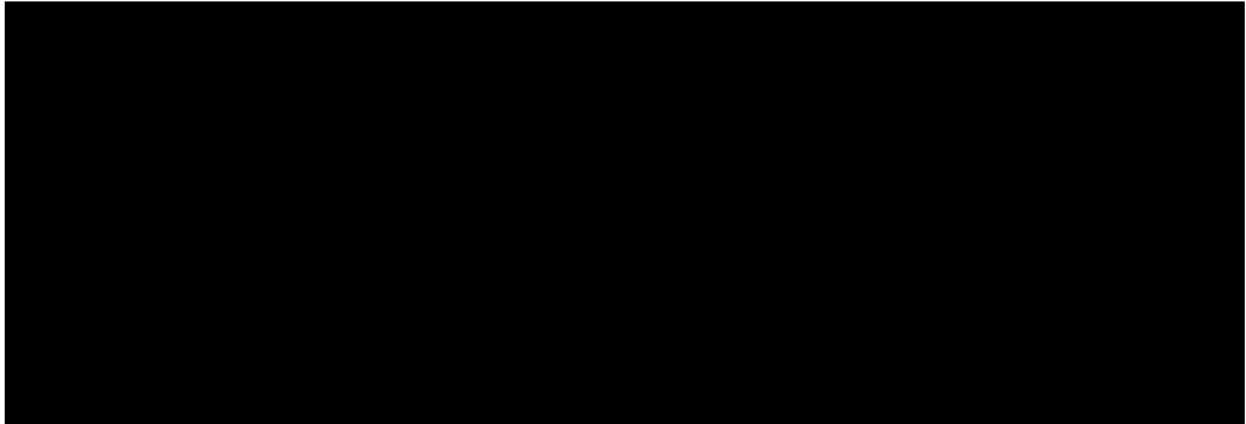
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One of the greatest attributes of this country - yet philosophically one of the most difficult - is that our social and political beliefs are more in the nature of a tradition and a tendency than a well-knit doctrine or unified theory. Our beliefs are more in the nature of a series of values which Americans have found to provide a better, more flexible guide to social, economic and political activity than any of the so-called systems. As one eminent philosopher has put it: "It is one of the signs of a democracy's vitality that attempts to define it or turn it into a creed fall short of the truth and generally sound silly. If we ever take to solemnly rehearsing slogans and formulas, we shall be near the end of our rope."

If there can be any single characterization of the American way of living, it would seem to be that it is experimental. Our attitudes more often than not have been historically experimental in the search for the "good life". With some notable exceptions, of course, the general tenor of the American Thesis in our experiment has reflected over many years pluralism, practicality, common sense, adventure, flexibility, and (not as incongruously as some might think), religiosity.

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I think we can agree with a concept which many would call typically American - that finality of judgment is not a prerogative of man and that therefore our experimental approach to the quest for the good life must be continuously reviewed and the evidence of results continuously weighed. As Sidney Hook has said, "It is the willingness to reconsider first principles in the light of relevant evidence.....which is the sign of the liberal and mature mind."

Evidence of this is that by and large we have been concerned with practical rather than theoretical philosophy. And as a result we have been more interested in the direction our beliefs point to, the results they produce. It is true that this concern with the practical has made us vulnerable to the criticisms not only of our enemies but also frequently of our friends. The charge is that because of our practical, experimental approach, we have become too absorbed with mundane matters and have given too little thought to spiritual and kindred affairs. Naturally, absorption with the practical has made materialists out of many Americans.

Yet it is nevertheless true that our rationalism has led many Americans to strong, idealistic points of view on many subjects. Consider the vitality of religion in this country. Certainly one explanation for that fact, which often has been ignored or misunderstood abroad, is that by and large Americans of all religious persuasions have rejected the notion that the "faith of our fathers" is a static thing. I do not mean that this is an exclusive quality, unique in America; but it is easily observable here.

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Religion is, or at least we recognize that it should be, a dynamic force which itself implies that we must examine and know what we profess, for otherwise it may not be true. The essential fact that God exists need not, or may not, be submitted to constant questioning. Yet the peculiar vitality and the remarkable expression of faith which characterizes religion in America does not come from mere acceptance of our fathers' religion, but rather from our constant demands that it be our religion as well and that it work. Faith and reason are not mutually exclusive. Americans evidently understand this, and it has been our concern with practicality, among other things, which has led us to this mature comprehension.

In all aspects of American living there has come the general acceptance of the notion that reason and feeling must be accepted not as conflicting forces, but as a team without whose equal pull little or nothing could be accomplished, that only a limited acceptance of a single point of view is valid because it must be modified by an acceptance of other viewpoints and attitudes.

When we come to contrasting the American approach with that of the Marxist to the quest for the good society and the solution of problems standing in the way, we should indicate at least that they stem perhaps from the same rational basis in that we try generally to guide and hold most of our opinions by the use of reason - as they say they do. But

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the major distinction comes in the completely different way we have of holding and applying our opinions and beliefs.

We have no complete, absolute metaphysical explanation of reality, based upon an abstraction such as the dialectic. We have not arrived at one single, fundamental philosophic belief. We have no ready-made, pat formulas which offer guarantees of attaining our goals and solving our problems. Even in times of great crisis we have not consciously sought THE answer to our problems, THE way out of our difficulty. Fortunately for us, we have not had to subscribe to the false doctrine that there can be ONE and only one solution.

If we can agree that the American approach and the Marxist approach are similar in that they both try to be rational, we should quickly say that there the similarity ends. Marxist application of reason has resulted in rational-materialism, called "historical-materialism", which claims a scientific basis and a complete answer to the problems of philosophy, morals, economics, politics and every other phenomenon in man's experience. The particular way in which this belief has been held by the Communists has resulted in a completely irrational absolutism. Theirs is a system which refuses to recognize the validity of any other explanation of reality or of man's historical processes. Theirs is a system which refuses to re-examine its own beliefs in the light of new evidence, except to rationalize it in such a manner that the new evidence will conform with the dogmatic beliefs.

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The appeal of this system has resulted from the fact that it does provide neat and seemingly reassuring answers to those who feel the need for final solutions to the vast number of problems confronting them. For ourselves, we can recognize the fact that the Marxist has ready answers for most of these problems, and we can further realize that ideally solutions to difficulties of all sorts are desirable. But because of practical historical experience, we know that the answers in the form of a monolithic world view are false.

Since, then, we have rejected the Marxist approach and have reasoned that our practical, non-abstract philosophy is more valid, what can we say about our concept of truth? We can say, I think, that if an idea which some say has in it the quality of truth, the idea must get itself accepted in the market-place of ideas. This is, as we have seen, the typically American, experimental philosophy which has an inherent distrust of abstractions. This has been called Pragmatism - an approach to philosophy which may be defined as the doctrine claiming that the meaning of conceptions is to be sought in their practical bearings.

William James has this to say:

The truth of an idea is not a stagnant property inherent in it. Truth happens to an idea. It becomes true, is made true by events: its verity is in fact an event, a process: the process namely of verifying itself, its veri - fication. Its validity is the process of valid - ation . . . The truth is the name of whatever proves itself to be good in the way of belief, and good, too, for definite assignable reasons.

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In other words, truth cannot be merely an abstraction. Truth is an evolving concept, and the principle which is true has become so only after demonstration of the fact that the principle works in practice.

In the original sense there is an irrationality about Pragmatism. For the selection of a principle implies an act of will, a choice, which may not at the particular moment lend itself to rational proof. An illustration of this is to be found in the case where Americans (not without some historical precedent, to be sure) assumed that their beliefs were true and acted to make them so. The value and worth of democracy, of freedom, of equality were assumed. The consequences of these principles were evaluated and thereafter Americans have committed themselves to making them work. You cannot visualize an American believing in Freedom merely as an abstraction. The fact that it is a true principle is the fact that it works.

And so the broad formula has become "A belief is true if it works." Naturally you will quickly see the danger in this axiom. For example, some would say that slavery "worked". The key word in the phrase is, of course, "works", which can mean different things in different situations. It can mean:

- a. "cash value" - that is, to "work" means to arrive at the facts or end which the belief predicts (truth must be found in experience-empiricism).
- b. Harmony with other beliefs - it must be consistent with and compatible with other things which we believe. (In this respect we could not say that slavery worked). The total result must be consistent.

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However, if only these two qualifications were taken literally - pragmatism would encourage each man to adopt the beliefs which worked best for him - regardless of their agreement with any other person's beliefs. But - it does not work to be out of accord with the beliefs of one's neighbors. To work perfectly - a belief must also be in harmony with the beliefs of other people.

Thus - "individual pragmatism" tends to give way to "social pragmatism" - which holds that belief to be true which works for the great majority of people in the long run. The truth of a belief can then only be determined by a long course of social experiment. This seems to be the prevailing type of philosophy in America today. Those beliefs which we hold - in religion - ethics - government, etc., are those which experience shows to promote the welfare of the mass of mankind after long trial.

A further development of this "social pragmatism" is the concept that the only justification for principles and concepts is achievement - progress marked out along the lines of the original design. It must be shown that the system leads to some valuable result which was not there at the beginning. Also means and ends must be kept in close harmony. Under certain circumstances which are well-defined and well-understood, the end does justify the means. The critical point to consider here, however, is that the notion is conditional upon the fact that it be the same end that was originally proposed and accepted. This is NOT license.

If the means we employ in a given situation are good but the end does not work, we must re-examine, revise or reject the premise involved. If the

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and is worth seeking but the means interfere or result in failure, the means must be similarly re-examined, revised or rejected.

Pragmatism - as a corollary - accepts the fact that there are common goals - consented to as a result of civilized experience. The study of history is here in point though its results are not necessarily binding. Thus the views, the beliefs, the concepts, of Western civilization need not be jettisoned periodically in favor of some new purely rational principle; but may be utilized pragmatically after being stripped of unfounded claims to represent unchanging facts.

This approach to knowledge and experience (for PRAGMATISM is an approach rather than a completed system) - although it has not always gone under the name of Pragmatism which is its American version has a long history in the political and economic concepts of Western civilization - primarily in Great Britain from which we inherit so many of our own now traditional concepts. Many of the conclusions - reached (in a rational manner, possibly) by political economic theorists in Great Britain - were adopted by the founders of this Country and through the years have been given the pragmatic test. It has been proved - conclusively - that they are true beliefs, because they have been found through experience to work. Perhaps the most significant case here in point is that of John Locke. Tolerance was one of the cardinal principles for which Locke stood, and he saw, as the greatest enemy of tolerance, the tendency of men to be dogmatic in their beliefs as the Communists are. He also concluded that

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this dogmatism -- in turn -- rested upon an assumption that the knowledge upon which the beliefs depended was absolutely certain. He then proceeded to demonstrate that, as a matter of fact, people tend to be dogmatic about just those beliefs which are least able to make any claim to be demonstrable. His final conclusion was that -- "We should not be so forward -- out of an affectation of universal knowledge -- to raise questions and perplex ourselves and others -- with disputes about things to which our understandings are not suited It is of great use to the sailor to know the length of his line -- though he cannot with it fathom all the depths of the ocean. It is well that he knows it is long enough to reach the bottom at such places as are necessary to direct his voyage and caution him against running on shoals that may ruin him. Our business here is not to know all things -- but those which concern our conduct."

Locke's approach to knowledge found expression in his political views-- some of which remain fundamental to our own political beliefs at the present time. He determined that absolute authority leads to a "state of nature" and that those who wield it do not stand in a relation of truth and justice to their fellow-citizens. Ultimate authority, therefore, can lie only in the people as a whole -- and the only form of government which can appropriately express this principle is that which leaves the executive functions subordinate to an assembly composed of elected representatives of the people. He emphasized the necessity (for living well) of freedom and tolerance, freedom for the individual to live his own life and maintain certain rights against the power of his government; tolerance in both politics and religion for all those who are not themselves, in principle, intolerant.

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These principles expounded by Locke were expanded and utilized in other fields by succeeding British political theorists - notably Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill. Bentham applied the principles of experience to the field of morals - and came forth with the principles of "the greatest good for the greatest number" - and indicating the necessity of political institutions and a legal system to adequately achieve that principle. John Stuart Mill utilized the principles of freedom and toleration in human conduct which Locke and Bentham had emphasized - and came forth with one of the clearest expressions we possess of INDIVIDUALISM (On Liberty).

These principles have been incorporated by American political theorists into the body of our American political concepts and foundations - by Jefferson, Adams, Franklin, Jackson, Lincoln - and their successors who have popularized and further expounded the principles based upon the general concept that that belief is best which finds general acceptance through experience because it works best for the greatest number.

The documents in which these principles are expressed are familiar to all of us - The Declaration of Independence, The Constitution, The Bill of Rights, the speeches and writings of Lincoln, etc. Those principles are also familiar to all of us. It is only necessary here to restate them very briefly - and to affirm the fact that they should not be considered merely as historical concepts, interesting, but not vital. They are the principles by which we are now governing our conduct - and with which all of us - as members of an organization such as this should be completely familiar. We consider the most fundamental of these political beliefs to be the following (within the framework of what is called the American version of democracy):

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1. A belief - or faith - in the dignity of man, founded on the consideration that every single person is valuable in his own right and for himself. The belief that if we permit each individual to exercise his own capacities to the fullest (within the necessary limitations of a just, well-ordered society) we will thereby enable him to make a worthwhile contribution to his family and to the society in which he is living.

And though we believe that since no society is possible without government, and since a government cannot be of all, a majority government must be established. We also believe that it is the responsibility of the majority to respect the dignity of the individual.

A further corollary of this principle is a belief in the rights of those individuals grouped together as a minority - to oppose the majority - to criticize the majority - to seek to replace the majority.

Thus we stand for individualism, as opposed to the mass man. We do not believe in the state as an absolute institution with a will to which we must conform (as even the majorities are made to conform in Communist-controlled nations).

2. A belief that governments derive their powers from the consent of the governed (the key word here is derive) - that government comes from below, not from above; that it comes from man, not from dictators; that government looks to the source of all power in the consent of man. Jefferson stated quite clearly that it was not only the right of man to change their government

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when it failed to serve their purposes, he went so far as to indicate that "ideally every constitution and every law naturally expires with each new generation." "If it be enforced any longer - it is an act of force - not of right." This sounds like revolutionary doctrine, but it is revolutionary only in the legal sense - as an appeal to the will of the people.

This means - in our society - that the original thinker (which is heresy in Communist lands) may serve the purpose of challenging or questioning the assumptions of the code under which we live and thus keep the code alive, significant, and meaningful. In the USSR and Eastern Europe, the original has been eliminated and the lies of the State prevail. In our society - when an administration lies for too long or does not serve the real interests of the people - we turn it out.

3. Based upon the concept of man as an individual and his equality with other individuals we believe, finally, in the historic doctrine of civil liberties, which states that man is something less than man unless he is possessed of the right to fair trial and to freedom of speech, press, association, and religion.

Jefferson, in his First Inaugural, stated this belief eloquently: "If there be any among us who wish to dissolve this Union - or change its republican form - let them stand undisturbed as monuments of the safety with which error of opinion may be tolerated where reason is left free to combat it."

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These, very briefly, are the political ideals to which we adhere. To accept these ideals, however, is to incur a responsibility - the responsibility, brought forth by our pragmatic approach, of making them a reality - of making them work. If these ideals are soundly conceived, and if they are within the general scope of human capacities, it should be feasible to support them with ways of living which have been validated through experience. They have been validated through experience - they do work - but only when the following responsibilities are accepted by those people living under these ideals:

1. The recognition and protection of a wide range of diversities based on the thorough understanding of the fact that where conformity is imposed as an external discipline, liberty is thereby excluded. This means the recognition of varying political ideas, races, religious creeds, types of education, etc. - and this is what makes democracy difficult - because forcing people to conform is frequently easier than tolerance.
2. The acceptance of the fact that our ideals are only partially attainable. There must be a recognized margin for error because of the experimental nature of democracy. In other words, the absolute, all-or-none, principle is only for dictatorships - and perfectionists must undergo the discipline of adaptation to partial success.
3. The acceptance of the assumption that means must be consonant with ends - and adherence to the assumption in the form of a moral behavior which tends to protect the ideals. The recognition that if

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humane and liberal ends are desired - one must behave humanely and liberally. The society or the individual which strives for democratic goals - must be disciplined in the use of democratic means.

These are our political ideals and responsibilities. Some brief attention should also be devoted to our economy which, being a capitalistic one is the aspect of our society which is under most constant attack by our Marxist opponents. And, since they are governed by an absolutist system of thought, the description of the inherent defects of capitalism which Marx propounded - class warfare, increasing misery, inevitable collapse, and imperialism - are still held to be above the will of men to change them. Hence - the warped criticism which refuses to recognize that the moral convictions of men (their ideals - if you will) can and have changed the course of capitalistic development. It may be true that American capitalism of the turn of the century or before deserved the criticism which is now being leveled against it - but it is not now valid. Although the problems which it now faces continue to be momentous, it has thus far met the pragmatic test - it has, at least partially, fulfilled the ideals of individualism and liberty within the necessary social framework and limitations.

Capitalism in the United States represents an economy which has not thrown off completely the doctrine of individualism which was once its sole focal point (stemming from the individualism of John Stuart Mill) - but like Mill's own individualism, it has been tempered by the concept that "the division of the produce of labor should be made in concert with

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acknowledged principles of justice." Mill stated the social problem of the future to be - "how to unite the greatest individual liberty of action with a common ownership of the raw materials of the globe - and an equal participation of all in the benefits of combined labor." This problem is, of course, a current one in Great Britain - it represents an individualistic version of socialism. It is also the problem, perhaps not so immediate, in the ^United States. Our economy - in the course of experience (and a considerable amount of strife) has been constantly evolving toward that state in which individualism is tempered by justice. We do not feel that there are only two absolute alternatives - either a system of complete private free enterprise - ~~or~~ a complete state-controlled collectivism. There ~~are~~ other alternatives.

One of our stated political responsibilities was the acceptance of diversity, stemming from the recognition that conformity to ~~any~~ principle alone (or one system alone) brings with it the exclusion of liberty or individualism. This is equally applicable to our economic concepts. We feel that there are more varieties of freedom in a society maintaining diversity of economic enterprise than in a society in which only one form is tolerated. In this economy - more varieties of motivation may be utilized - individual private enterprise - corporate enterprise - cooperative enterprise - and to a certain extent government-operated (or controlled) enterprise. This system, we feel, operates on behalf of the majority - it brings "the greatest good to the greatest number." And if all alternatives except one were excluded, only one type of

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minority could enjoy an economic experience - the others, the majority, would be frustrated.

Our interpretation of recent history indicates that a large measure of industrial and economic planning is inescapable. We also interpret it to mean the ~~complete~~ nationalization - ~~over-all~~ planning - and the totalitarian state inevitably coalesces, at the cost of all individual values. There is a difference, in other words, between a totally planned society - and a continuously ~~planning~~ society. Our experience has led us to prefer the latter. It provides us with an economy in which there is still individualistic opportunity, but which at the same time provides a floor to bolster the economically weak.

Finally - the problem arises of the application of these principles of the American Thesis to the international situation. The world policy of this Country - where the American Thesis prevails internally - should not represent merely a negative anti-Communism; it should present a positive extension of our internal ideals. It does. These ideals have been brought to bear in our international relations. There have been exceptions, perhaps, serious exceptions - ~~but~~, by and large, several important principles are being stressed and implemented in our dealings with other countries. These are:

1. The establishment of world peace and security through the organization of the United Nations - a peace and security that would give all nations the means of living safely within their boundaries -

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and all men the assurance that their lives might be lived in freedom from fear and want.

2. The right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live - self-determination (hostility to imperialism).
3. The access of all states, on equal terms, to the trade and raw materials of the world.
4. Full cooperation in the economic field to assure economic recovery of war-torn areas and economic stability to others.
5. The limitation of armed aggression.

The Communist world at the present time represents an area in which national aspirations have been subverted and human aspirations suppressed. The extension of the American Thesis into the international field is an attempt to implement the concepts of the dignity of the individual, self-determination, civil liberties - and an economic security compatible with individual freedom.

These are our beliefs, or ideals - internal and international. They represent, primarily, a method for meeting problems. That method may be summed up as the experimental application of social intelligence - under democratic control and with democratic responsibility.

If there is general agreement that pragmatism is a typically American approach to philosophy and our outlook on living, what Jacques Barzun has to say is, I think, relevant. And certainly it indicates what is

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our great and ultimate reservoir of strength:

".....Pragmatism is the only form of thought appropriate to - I will not say a democratic nation, but even more broadly, a polyglot planet: for pragmatic relativism is both a safeguard ~~against~~ absolutes which when ambitious invariably turn tyrannical; and a safeguard for those absolutes when their claims to universality remain within the bounds of decent social behavior. Only a pragmatist will cheerfully recognize that some persons cannot live without believing that they exclusively possess the whole truth about ultimate matters. The reverse tolerance is not to be expected, since absolute authority cannot in logic or in fact accept doubt or dissent.

This is what we offer as an alternative to absolutism and totalitarianism. Internally - we are making our beliefs, our ideals work - and we feel, therefore, that they are true beliefs. Internationally - we have not been as successful as could be desired. We seem to be exhausting the possibilities of overt diplomatic action without outstanding success. We have demonstrated a willingness to resort to overt warfare, but that can never be finally successful. We assume, therefore, that is the reason why all of you are here. You recognize the present necessity and justification for the use of clandestine methods to implement and protect our principles. You recognize the incontestable fact that the American Thesis and the society which supports it is under constant attack

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by the proponents of absolutism. And you should now be aware of the fact that we feel that these clandestine means - so long as they keep the basic principles in mind - so long as we are willing to review ends as well as means - so long as our principles do not solidify into monolithic dogma (which would also makes the means wrong) - are justified in protecting the security and assuring the continuation of the American Thesis.

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